DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 243 369 HE 017 175

AUTHOR Simmons, Howard L.
TITLE Minority Involvement in the Accreditation Process.
PUB DATE Apr 84
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Northeast Regional Conference of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges National Conference on Black American Affairs (April 1984).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Accreditation (Institutions); *Accrediting Agencies; *Affirmative Action; *Black Teachers; Higher Education; Hispanic Americans; Institutional Evaluation; Leadership; *Minority Groups; Power Structure; Racial Discrimination; *Teacher Participation

ABSTRACT

Perspectives concerning the lack of participation of many minority persons in colleges and universities in the accreditation process are offered, along with recommendations for accrediting agencies, colleges, and minorities. It is noted that the executive staffs of accrediting bodies have no blacks. Further, no staff of the national agencies has any minority representation, and only two of the six regional agencies have black executive staff. Practices of the Middle States region include the following: the usual method of identifying potential evaluators is through recommendations from chief executive officers or college chief academic officers; generally, few persons who have had no previous evaluation experience are appointed to an evaluation team; and some blacks and other minority groups turn down the opportunity to serve on teams. Suggestions for accrediting agencies include: involve more minorities from all types of higher education institutions in activities; and instruct evaluation team members to review the institution's commitment to equity in enrollment and employment. Recommendations for colleges include: include minority staff in campus self-study; and become more aggressive in the identification of competent minorities for evaluation teams. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED243369

"MINORITY INVOLVEMENT IN THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS"

By: Howard L. Simmons, Ph.D.

Colleagues in the profession, few topics in higher education are as important to me - and should be to you - as this one. That's why I readily accepted your invitation to participate when contacted by Dr. Sanders. We are indeed fortunate to have some Blacks, like Dr. Sanders, who not only believe in the intrinsic worth of accreditation but also recognize the power of and potential empowerment inherent in the process. However, it is still little known, not well understood, or avoided by too many minority persons in our colleges and universities. And, of course, there are logical as well as unexplained reasons for this lack of participation; some are through no fault of our own and others are related to our own indifference, lack of interest, order of priorities, or demanding schedules. We'll get to some of these later.

At this point, let me paint a picture for you of an accrediting world which is largely white and male. Even if you assess only the composition of the executive staffs of the national, regional and specialized accrediting bodies, you will soon discover - to your dismay - that there are no Blacks at the helm of national, regional or specialized agencies. Further, no staff of the nationals has any minority representation, only two of the six regionals have Black executive staff (at the associate level), and I know of no specialized agency with minority leadership at the top. By the way, the Southern Association's Commission on Colleges leads the way with two Black Associate Executive Directors, and Middle States' Commission on Higher Education has yours truly, even though at one point in our history there was another Black female at MSA/CHE.

If that's the picture from a staffing perspective, what about governing boards, commissions, and more important, evaluators, chairpersons, and consultants? Believe it or not, there is a slight change in the complexion, but not much for some agencies, and here I'll limit my comments to Middle States, since it's the regional that I know best. Moreover, very soon I'll be undertaking some sorely needed research in this area, which is long overdue. When compared to other agencies, Middle States has done a remarkable job of improving minority involvement in the accreditation process. But we will not be satisfied until there

HE017 175

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Howard L Simmons

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

is a larger pool of trained Blacks and Hispanics from which to draw evaluation team members and chairpersons, as well as actual statistics showing a greater percentage of the overall evaluator pool being utilized in these capacities. Presently, we have only a couple of hundred Blacks and Hispanics out of a pool of several thousand. And last year alone, we were able to count only 86 Blacks and Hispanics among those serving on evaluation teams.

These numbers reflect some realities with which you should be familiar. Among these are the following:

1) The usual method of identifying potential evaluators is through recommendations from chief executive officers or chief academic officers of the member colleges and universities, even though some are recommended by other evaluators, self-recommended, or are identified by CHE/MSA staff. In any event, you can see readily why some of you never emerge for consideration, particularly since most of the recommenders are white.

2) Except in unusual circumstances, few persons can be appointed to a team who have had no previous CHE/MSA evaluation experience. Obviously, then, this means the slower introduction of new minority evaluators into the process. But, how does one get that experience if one never serves the first time?

3) Apparently because of the limited number of minority persons in higher education and the excessive demands placed on their time, some Blacks and Hispanics turn down the opportunity to serve on teams. This adds further to the frustration met in trying to increase numbers. Moreover, any evaluator must have a couple of excellent experiences on other evaluation assignments before he or she can become a team chairperson.

4) There is not enough of a mix among potential minority evaluators already in agency files, particularly in fields such as natural science, finance, business administration, and computer science.

5) Some minority persons react negatively when it is suggested that they're being called upon not only for their subject or area of expertise, but

also because balance is needed in terms of minority concerns. Curious, isn't it? Some of us still have severe identity problems or problems of over-identity with the majority culture (i.e., lack of positive self-concept.)

6) Because there would appear to be less commitment to affirmative action or employment equity for Blacks and other minority persons today, there has been an actual decline in the number of minorities among the faculties and staffs of colleges and universities. Indeed some of the gains experienced in the 60's and 70's have been erased. It should be recognized that, in many respects, accrediting bodies are mere microcasms of the higher education community, reflecting the same representation "portrait".

7) Reportedly, some potential Black evaluators have received veiled threats of reprise should they be absent from their campus to participate on teams.

Even though these may lead one to believe that little can be done by way of improving an unsatisfactory situation, there are definite strategies and courses of action which can be developed in order to bring about desirable changes. However, powerful and influential accrediting agencies may be as organizational elites, if one applies organizational theory,[1] it is assumed that minorities as a status group can be effective if their representation in the process is constant and numerous enough. Remember that if we are represented, we can be active and, often, persuasive participants. If we are not there, particular points of view or concerns may never be voiced, or the fact that minority involvement is needed may never be considered.

What can be done specifically by accrediting agencies, colleges and universities, and minority persons themselves?

Accrediting agencies can:

1) Take affirmative steps to assure that its essential of nondiscrimination is met by all member and candidate institutions, thereby resulting in a larger pool of potential minority evaluation personnel.

2) Involve more minorities from all types of higher education institutions (including predominartly Black and Hispanic colleges) in their activities.

That would mean more minorities on accrediting commissions, governing boards, evaluation teams. Steps would be taken to identify qualified minorities to be trained for leadership roles as team chairpersons, consultants and special visitors, rather than relying solely on the college president (who is usually white) to nominate deserving and competent minority individuals.

3) Admonish evaluation team members to review the institution's commitment to equity in enrollment and employment in consonance with the college's own stated objectives. While the team members should not be prescriptive in their recommendations, the team report should contain recommendations reflecting the team's assessment of progress in the institution's own affirmative action program as well as its commitment to minority clientele and staff.

4) Provide teams with specific instructions on the assessment of higher education equity programs when colleges and universities are visited (e.g., CHE/MSA "Characterics of Excellence in Higher Education".)[2]

5) Make a conscious effort to include minority representation on all evaluation teams.

6) Be particularly sensitive to the need for minority representation on teams which are sent to institutions which have significant members of minorities. In addition to minority presence and competence, attention can be given to the unique needs and concerns of these groups.

Member institutions can:

1) Increase their numbers of minorities available for the evaluators pool through stronger programs of recruitment and employment of minority faculty and staff.

2) Become more aggressive in the identification and recommendation of highly competent minority professions to accrediting agencies for learning as well as service on evalution teams.

3) Assure that minority faculty and staff are included in the campus self-study processes as members of steering committees, subcommittees, task forces, and other study groups.

4) Include minority persons in workshops and conferences on self-study and evalution, on and off-campus.

5) Carefully review visiting team rosters to assure that there exists some minority representation.

6) Assist the accrediting agencies in research related to minority involvement in accreditation.

Minority personnel can:

1) Develop a keener awareness of the accreditation process and its impact on their overall development.

2) Request that they be recommended as potential evaluators by their own institutions or by other experienced evaluators and chairpersons.

3) Place accreditation as a higher priority and resist the temptation to reject invitations to serve as evaluators or chairpersons.

4) Volunteer to serve on campus self-study committees, program review committees, and planning groups, since minority persons may be "inadvertently" overlooked.

5) Examine campus self-study reports to determine whether minority issues and concerns have been appropriately and adequately addressed.

6) Take advantage of the opportunity to participate in interviews with evaluation team members to assure that minority points of view will be considered.

7) Develop positive self-concepts as minorities, so that all issues will not become "colorless".

Granted, these strategies and courses of action may not be all-encompassing, but they should serve as basis for real progress in improving the involvement of minorities in the evaluation and accreditation process. In my judgment, the following quote constitutes an appropriate concluding statement:

> "...if increased opportunity for higher education is not to be a sham and a delusion for minority people, it must be accompanied by equal opportunity to participate fully in every aspect of American life."[3]

In my judgment, accreditation with its powerful influence cannot be excluded from the arena of minority involvement.

March 1984

FOOTNOTES

1. Weber, M., " A Conflict Theory of Educational Stratification", in American Sociological Review, Vol. 36, No. 5 (October, 1971), 1008-1010.

2. Commission on Higher Education, Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, "Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education",

3. "Inequality of Opportunity for Higher Education", in American Sociological Review, Vol. 36, No. 5 (October, 1971), 805.

© March, 1984 (Presentation made to the NE Regional Conference of the AACJC National Conference on Black American Affairs.)

March 1984